



THE TOWNSHIP OF BRIDGEWATER

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The Bridgewater emblem is a symbol. We see symbols everywhere in life. Companies use symbols as logos. Townships use symbols as emblems. These symbols do not possess much value in themselves, but their importance arises from what meanings they convey or denote. Our Bridgewater Township emblem is a symbol that has within itself the significance of history, and the meaning behind it that is momentous and meaningful.

Bridgewater Township did not pick any arbitrary year to adopt its first emblem in 1976. That was the 200th anniversary of our Declaration of Independence. After holding a public contest for a design, Ms. Barbara Kuzio, a lifelong resident of Bridgewater, won the contest with a watercolor design depicting the contest requirements of a scenic and historic township. Then, the Township asked Mr. Frank Maples, another Bridgewater resident, to modify Ms. Kuzio's image into a graphically printable representation of Ms. Kuzio's design, resulting in the adoption of the emblem version we see today on our Township's building, flag, presentations, and vehicles.

Since its historic adoption on the 200th anniversary of freedom, our Bridgewater Township emblem has stood in front of the podium at countless Mayoral addresses; was present during many swearing-in ceremonies; our emblem has stood high in Council chambers; has been worn proudly on our vehicles; it has been present while our brave men and women police officers

protected and served our residents; and has been the symbol of our Township in countless presentations of public and historic importance. The emblem of the Township deserves the respect of its meaning and the history it represents.

Township emblems are not readily changed, tweaked, or “refreshed” without justification. Some townships have faced the need as certain aspects of their emblems’ depictions may be insulting or provoke unintended bad feelings, perhaps misplaced after decades of equality improvements. For these municipalities, emblem changes may be necessary. But even in those towns, changing the emblem most often involves public input and participation, often asking residents, similarly to Bridgewater in 1976, to provide designs in an award contest. After all, the emblem belongs to the people of the township it will duly proudly represent.

When searching the Internet, it was difficult to find examples of situations where other towns had changed their emblem. The few examples that I did find support the fact that township emblems are hardly ever changed and, in rare moments that they are, almost always involve a public process.

The emblem that is displayed above our heads, bearing the words “scenic”, “historic” and “Chartered 1749 in the County of Somerset,” belongs to the people. Although I don’t support changing our emblem, if this task is going to happen, then the process you are about to undertake is simply inappropriate. When municipalities do undertake the task of changing their emblem, it is almost always after public input and public participation.

Frequently, such emblem changes are done only after a contest of sorts is held so that anyone in the community can provide their submissions. Through this process, the public is involved in the ultimate rendering of the

emblem, and it is then a true reflection of the community. Without such public input, you are depriving our community of their rightful involvement in the process of designing their Township emblem. If this governing body is going to change or “refresh” the Township’s emblem, then it too should have a process established that encourages and invites public participation for the emblem’s ultimate design.

Last year, Massachusetts embarked on changing its State emblem to remove a Native American man, which many found offensive to Indigenous people, but the public was asked to provide submissions. Similarly, in 2017, New York’s Village of Whitesboro’s emblem showed a Native America man being overpowered by a white person. In 2021, the Town in Mashpee, Massachusetts, adopted a new emblem because the prior one had a colonial image of a sword raised above the head of a Native American.

In our home-state of New Jersey, in 2016, a national atheist group asked the Borough of Clayton to remove the Christian cross from the town’s emblem, but the governing body took the position that the emblem represented Clayton’s history and fought back. Recently, in 2011, Union County’s emblem came under attack, with some upset that it shows the murderous shooting death of Elizabethtown’s Hannah Caldwell during the Revolutionary War. But not even Union County decided to change its seal, instead respecting the historical and symbolic meaning it has beyond its visual image.

Someset County was founded in 1688. An accidental courthouse fire in 1737 destroyed significant records, so we don’t have the precise date of the adoption of the County seal, but we do know that our County seal has been unchanged for nearly 300 years. Likewise, the counties surrounding us have county emblems that are hundreds of years old. Our neighboring towns too

have emblems, many older than Bridgewater's. Emblems that are even older than Bridgewater's, and yet the governing bodies in those municipalities and counties have protected them, respected these emblems, and did not feel right to "refresh" their designs.

We all watch across America as some want to change our history with the removal of historic statutes, change the words of history, and remove symbolic symbols - because it fits some political agendas. Our flag and National Anthem are also symbols. For example, we've seen our National symbols be disrespected when people don't stand up for the National Anthem. Symbols do have real significance, and are bigger and beyond the mere imagery they show. It is their history, where they've been, the meaning they gave to so many, and what the symbols represent - that ultimately matter.

The Bridgewater Township Council now has a Resolution before it to change our Township's symbol – our emblem – that has represented our Township and our community since 1976. An emblem that has a history for almost 50 years, and was adopted after public participation and on a historically significant date. Some may not like the visual appearance of our logo and want to change it because it is graphically unpleasing to them. But this is not a reason to change symbols that have a historic meaning. And such symbols, except for unusual circumstances, don't need a "refresh".

It is not the norm for townships across this Country to "refresh" their emblems. Even more Liberal thinking governing bodies have the common sense to understand and resist the temptation to change such symbols - because these emblems stand for something larger than the art or words on their face.

And so too does our Bridgewater Township emblem, as it is a symbol with historic roots that has stood for something when it was displayed at Township functions, at Council meetings, at police ceremonies, swearing-ins, speeches, on cars, windows, and flags, and when we celebrated moments together as a community, and shared sorrows together during natural disasters and passing of community heroes. It is an emblem that stands for our history, our community, and what we have been through, and what we are today as Bridgewater.

I therefore respectfully ask you to protect our history, our heritage, and what we are as Bridgewater as has been proudly displayed in our Township's original and only emblem, and vote NO on the Resolution to change our Bridgewater emblem.